

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 8, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building, Room 200-A  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Seven years ago, President Barack Obama made a bold commitment to clean up the Chesapeake Bay, a national treasure that is a critical resource for the states that we represent. Executive Order 13508 on Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration signaled an important change for the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed—renewed Federal leadership and financial support for a multistate effort that lacked adequate funding for decades.

Since then, under the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint (also known as the Chesapeake Bay TMDL), significant progress has been made to reduce pollution from the 64,000-square-mile watershed, according to a recent assessment by EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program. Commitment and collaboration from the six watershed states and the District of Columbia have been strong.

Yet, there is still significant work to do, and Federal funding is more important than ever. With the remarkable participation of the agriculture sector, several states have made significant reductions in nutrient and soil run-off. It is apparent that American farmers want what is good for their land and the supporting waterways. However, when farm incomes are strained and matching funds are limited or even eliminated, Federal leadership is incredibly important to support continued investments in conservation.


We know that we still face a major challenge in reducing pollution from agriculture, particularly in resource-strained regions of the Chesapeake watershed. Despite recent funding pressures, farmers throughout the country, and many in the Chesapeake Bay region, have shown that the necessary reductions in agricultural pollution can be achieved at modest cost and without

degrading productivity. But family farmers, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet, cannot undertake these activities without financial help. Your Executive Order 13508 recognizes this by directing the USDA to be the lead agency to target resources to better protect the Chesapeake Bay and its tributary waters. In order to ensure continued success of this important effort, we need to deploy our limited Federal resources as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We urgently request your leadership by directing the Natural Resources Conservation Service to reallocate previously allocated, non-expended funds to states subject to the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint. The purpose of many of the Farm Bill conservation programs is to promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals in part by assisting producers in complying with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements. The Chesapeake Bay TMDL presents an historic and comprehensive regulatory requirement. Reallocating any available non-expended funds will provide farmers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed with financial and technical assistance to comply with the TMDL. At the same time, prioritizing investment in the Bay through reallocation will fulfil existing commitments made in Executive Order 13508 to support priority conservation practices that most efficiently reduce nutrient and sediment loads to the Chesapeake Bay.

The Chesapeake Bay is this country's largest estuary. Restoring the Bay to health can be one of the landmark achievements of your tenure, but only if the Blueprint is on a strong future course.

Sincerely,




CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
Member of Congress




ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT  
Member of Congress



STENY HOYER  
Member of Congress



ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON  
Member of Congress

  
ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS  
Member of Congress

  
C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER  
Member of Congress

  
JOHN P. SARBANES  
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GERALD E. CONNOLLY  
Member of Congress

  
DONNA F. EDWARDS  
Member of Congress

  
JOHN K. DELANEY  
Member of Congress

  
DONALD S. BEYER, JR.  
Member of Congress

  
MATT CARTWRIGHT  
Member of Congress